

Week Ending Friday, January 23, 1998

**Remarks at the Signing Ceremony
for the Baltic Nations-United States
Charter of Partnership**

January 16, 1998

The President. President Meri; President Brazauskas; President Ulmanis; members of the Estonian, Lithuanian, and Latvian delegations; Secretary Albright; Mr. Berger; Members of Congress; Senator Dole; Mr. Brzezinski; and all friends of the Baltic nations who are here.

The Vice President and I and our administration were honored to welcome President Meri, President Brazauskas, and President Ulmanis to Washington to reaffirm our common vision of a Europe whole and free, where Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia play their full and rightful roles, and to sign a charter of partnership to build that Europe together.

To the three Presidents, let me say thank you. Thank you for the key role you have played in making this moment possible; holding to the difficult path of political and economic reform; leading Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania back to the community of free nations where they belong. This charter of partnership underscores how far your nations have come. Almost exactly 7 years ago today, Baltic citizens were facing down tanks in the struggle to reclaim their independence. Today, your democracies have taken root. You stand among Europe's fastest growing economies. Your nations are a source of stability within your region and beyond, through the Partnership For Peace, the Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion, and your contributions in Bosnia.

America has been proud to support this progress through our SEED assistance program, more than 500 Peace Corps volunteers, and in many other ways. We share a stake in your success. And with this charter, we set out a framework to achieve our common goals. It affirms our commitment to pro-

moting harmony and human dignity within our societies; it stresses our interest in close cooperation among the Baltic States and with all their neighbors; it launches new working groups on economic development to spur greater trade, investment, and growth, complementing the efforts of our European friends; and it furthers America's commitment to help Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia to deepen their integration and prepare for membership in the European Union and NATO.

Of course, there can be no guarantees of admission to the alliance. Only NATO's leaders, operating by consensus, can offer membership to an aspiring state. But America's security is tied to Europe, and Europe will never be fully secure if Baltic security is in doubt. NATO's door is and will remain open to every partner nation, and America is determined to create the conditions under which Estonia, Lithuania, and Latvia can one day walk through that door.

The hopes that fuel the goals of this charter must be matched by our will to achieve them. That's why we're forming a new partnership commission which Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott will chair. I'm pleased to report that the charter is making a difference already. Yesterday our nations signed treaties to eliminate double taxation, which will encourage American business to play an even greater role in Baltic prosperity. We're also expanding our common efforts to combat organized crime with better information-sharing and more joint operations.

And this year the United States, in a unique public-private partnership with the Soros Open Society Institute, will be creating a Baltic-American partnership fund to promote the development of civic organizations. Nothing is more crucial to democracy's success than a vibrant network of local groups committed to their communities and their nation. I want to thank George Soros for his visionary generosity.

I also want to say a special thanks to the Baltic-American communities. For 50 years, Lithuanian-, Latvian-, and Estonian-Americans kept alive the dream of Baltic freedom. Now, on the verge of a new century, they are working here at home and with their Baltic brothers and sisters to make sure the hard-won blessings of liberty will never be lost again.

President Meri, President Brazauskas, President Ulmanis, we recall the August day in 1989 when hundreds of thousands of people linked hands from Tallinn to Riga to Vilnius, forming a human chain as strong as the values for which it stood. Today, that Baltic chain extends across the Atlantic Ocean. America's hands and hearts and hopes are joined as one with yours. Working together, we can build a new Europe of democracy, prosperity, and peace, where security is the province of every nation and the future belongs to the free.

Thank you very much.

President Guntis Ulmanis of Latvia.

Dear President, ladies and gentlemen, today is a happy day as we are signing the U.S.A.-Baltic charter. This charter will serve as a key for the next century. It makes us allies. Our signatures write the strategic philosophy for the next century. They mark strong Atlanticism and also the formation of a new Europe. The Baltic region is a success story for all who shape it by their everyday work.

I call on President Clinton and his administration to get actively involved in the formation of its future. The symbolic meaning of the charter has been expressed in its first words, which speak about our common vision of the future. It has been created by people of our countries in continuous work by mutual enrichment. I am proud of my people and its strengths. I am proud of my friends who I am happy to welcome here.

Thank you.

President Algirdas Brazauskas of Lithuania. Dear Presidents, ladies and gentlemen, today we are signing the particularly important document with the United States of America, with which we not only share common values but are also linked by a number of American Lithuanians who have found home in the United States. The charter of partnership establishes the institutional

framework that promotes the furtherance of bilateral and multilateral cooperation, reciprocal support to the Euro-Atlantic integration, and common efforts designed for the consolidation of security, prosperity, and stability within the region and Euro-Atlantic area as the whole.

The U.S.-Baltic charter confirms repeatedly that Lithuania is a serious candidate for accession to NATO, as well as that the United States support the Baltic States' aspirations and their efforts to become members of the alliance.

Lithuania values the charter first and foremost as the commitment to its further role as the promoter of stability within our region and Europe as a whole, its commitment to progress, economic reforms, and further enhancement of defense system effectiveness and interoperability with the North Atlantic alliance. We appreciate and are supportive of President Clinton's and the U.S. role of leadership in opening up to Central European democracies the doors to history's most successful alliance. It is our hope that this openness to new members will enhance the security and stability for all the present and aspiring members, as well as other European nations.

Thank you.

President Lennart Meri of Estonia. Mr. President, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, today is an historic day in the history of our four nations. With the signing of the charter of partnership among the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia, and the Republic of Lithuania, we enter a new phase of even closer United States-Baltic relations.

Seventy-five years ago last summer, the United States and Estonia—[inaudible]—diplomatic relations, thus launching a special relationship based in mutual respect and trust. There is an old saying that one recognizes a true friend in times of need. With its bipartisan support for nonrecognition policy, America was a true friend of the Baltics in a time of need, acting as a beacon of hope throughout the long, dark, and cold years of the Soviet occupation.

You, Mr. President, were a true friend when, 4 years ago, you personally contributed to making sure that occupation would

end and the foreign troops were withdrawn. This principled behavior is one quality of United States foreign policy that we greatly admire. The fact that morals play a major role in Americans' foreign policy is what defines the United States as the world's remaining superpower.

Estonia sees the United States-Baltic charter as the latest expression of that principled approach. The charter recognizes the Baltic States' role in the American strategy to guarantee security and stability on the European Continent, and spells out that the United States has a real, profound, and enduring interest in the security and sovereignty of the Baltic States.

An important element in our security strategy is eventual full membership in NATO. We believe that NATO continues to be the sole guarantor of security and stability in Europe. Estonia applauds President Clinton for his leadership in starting the process of NATO enlargement which has already redefined the terms of security policy in Europe.

Estonia also understands that NATO enlargement through the Baltics will be the next big project of the alliance. We believe that the question of Baltic membership in NATO will become the real test of post-Madrid security thinking—that is, that countries shall be able to choose their security arrangements regardless of geography. We are confident that, with American leadership, this test will be met with success.

Thank you.

The President. I thank you all. We are now going to sign our charter. Before we do, I just want to say again how much I appreciate all of our guests coming here, all from the three nations, their American counterparts. And thank you, Senator Durbin, Congresswoman Pelosi, Congressman Shimkus, Congressman Kucinich. Thank you, Senator Dole and Mr. Brzezinski.

And I'd also like to point out—I didn't earlier—we have a very large, unusually large, representation from the diplomatic corps here, which is a tribute to the importance of this moment that the rest of the world community attaches to it. And I thank all the ambassadors who are here. Thank you all very much for your presence.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:45 p.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to former Senator Bob Dole; former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski; and philanthropist George Soros, chairman, Soros Fund Management, LCC. He also referred to the Support for East European Democracy (SEED) Program. This item was not received in time for publication in the appropriate issue.

A Charter of Partnership Among the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia, and Republic of Lithuania

January 16, 1998

Preamble

The United States of America, the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia, and the Republic of Lithuania, hereafter referred to as Partners.

Sharing a common vision of a peaceful and increasingly integrated Europe, free of divisions, dedicated to democracy, the rule of law, free markets, and respect for the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all people;

Recognizing the historic opportunity to build a new Europe, in which each state is secure in its internationally-recognized borders and respects the independence and territorial integrity of all members of the transatlantic community;

Determined to strengthen their bilateral relations as a contribution to building this new Europe, and to enhance the security of all states through the adaptation and enlargement of European and transatlantic institutions;

Committed to the full development of human potential within just and inclusive societies attentive to the promotion of harmonious and equitable relations among individuals belonging to diverse ethnic and religious groups;

Avowing a common interest in developing cooperative, mutually respectful relations with all other states in the region;

Recalling the friendly relations that have been continuously maintained between the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Latvia, and the Republic of Lithuania since 1922;